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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives

The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in accordance with the programme of work of the Commission on the Status of Women for 2007-2009 which identified "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" as the priority theme for the Commission's fifty-first session. The report analyses the current situation of the girl child and proposes recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

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I. Introduction

1. At its fiftieth session, the Commission on the Status of Women decided to consider "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" as the priority theme at its fifty-first session, within its agreed programme of work for 2007-2009.[1] The Commission will also consider a report on progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes, with a particular focus on the priority theme.[2]

2. In order to facilitate increased understanding of the manifestations of discrimination and violence against the girl child and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), organized an Expert Group Meeting at the Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, from 25 to 28 September 2006. An online discussion organized by the Division from 8 August to 12 September 2006 provided additional insights.

3. The present report provides an analysis of discrimination and violence against the girl child and proposes recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

II. Global policy and legal framework

4. The 1990 World Summit for Children placed the survival, development and protection of the girl child on the international agenda. It acknowledged that equal rights for girls and the equal participation of women in the social, cultural, economic and political life of societies were prerequisites for successful and sustainable development.[3] The General Assembly, at its twenty-seventh special session on children, recognized that achieving the development goals for children, particularly girls, was contingent upon, inter alia, women's empowerment.[4]

5. The Beijing Platform for Action noted that discrimination and violence against girls began at the earliest stages of life, and continued through childhood into adult life. Fewer girls than boys survived into adulthood because of harmful attitudes and practices, such as son preference resulting in prenatal sex selection and female infanticide, female genital mutilation, early marriage including child marriage, violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, discriminatory food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being.[5] The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly identified child labour, violence, lack of access to education, and sexual abuse as obstacles the girl child continued to face and called for the creation of an environment that did not tolerate violations of the rights of women and girls.[6]

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[1] See Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9, para. 23 (*a*).

[2] E/CN.6/2007/3.

[3] See World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s (A/45/625), annex.

[4] See General Assembly resolution S-27/2 entitled "A world fit for children", para. 23.

[5] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 259.

[6] See General Assembly resolution S-23/3, entitled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", para. 68 (*a*).

6. At the 10-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2005, Member States reported that, despite the achievements made, particularly in relation to the enactment of legislation, the protection of the rights of the girl child had not been fully achieved.[7] Harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation/cutting, and early and forced marriages, persisted. Girls were also at high risk of sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, including in conflict and post-conflict situations.

7. The General Assembly has regularly addressed the situation of the girl child, including through resolutions on traditional and customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, and trafficking in women and girls. In resolution 60/141 of 16 December 2005 on the girl child, the Assembly expressed deep concern about the discrimination and violation of the rights of the girl child, which placed girls at a disadvantage compared to boys with respect to education, nutrition, physical and mental health care, curtailed their rights, denied them the opportunities and benefits of childhood and adolescence and subjected them to various forms of cultural, social, sexual and economic exploitation. The Assembly also voiced concern that girls were among the most adversely affected by poverty and armed conflict.

8. In 2006, during the comprehensive review of the targets in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2001), Member States recognized that gender inequalities and violence against women and girls increased their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, and pledged to eliminate gender inequalities, gender-based abuse and violence, and increase the capacity of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection.[8]

9. Two studies submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session drew attention to violence faced by girls. The report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children noted that girls are at greater risk than boys of early marriage, genital mutilation, forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence, and forced prostitution.[9] The study called on States to ensure that anti-violence policies and programmes are designed and implemented with a gender perspective, taking into account the different risks facing boys and girls in respect to violence.[10] The Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women underlined that a woman may experience various forms of violence across her life cycle. It highlighted particular forms of violence against girls and young women, such as son preference, prenatal sex selection, female infanticide, early marriage and forced marriage and dowry-related violence. It also pointed to sites where such violence occurs, for example within the family, in the community including in schools, and in conflict settings.[11] The study drew attention to new and emerging forms of violence including "date rape".[12]

10. The Commission on the Status of Women has, since its thirty-fifth session, adopted resolutions on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS. The most recent, resolution 50/2 of 10 March 2006, highlighted, inter alia, the vulnerability of

[7] See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/review/english/responses.htm.

[8] See General Assembly resolution 60/262, entitled "Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS", annex, para. 30.

[9] See A/61/299, paras. 24, 28, 30, 43 and 45.

[10] Ibid., para. 106.

[11] See A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1, para. 111.

[12] Ibid., para. 83.

women, girls and adolescents to HIV. It noted that the pandemic reinforced gender inequalities, with women and girls bearing a disproportionate share of the burden, including care and support for those infected and affected by the disease.[13]

11. At its forty-second session, the Commission considered the issue of the girl child with emphasis on adolescent girls as a priority theme, and adopted agreed conclusions that proposed actions and initiatives to, inter alia, promote and protect the human rights of the girl child; provide education and empowerment; improve the health needs of girls; protect girls in armed conflict, and prevent trafficking and exploitative labour conditions.[14]

12. The Convention on the Rights of the Child[15] and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,[16] together with their Optional Protocols, as well as other conventions and treaties, provide the legal framework for the protection and promotion of the human rights of girls. They prescribe a comprehensive set of measures to ensure the elimination of discrimination against the girl child. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier," and article 2 clarifies that Convention rights are to be enjoyed by children "without discrimination of any kind", including on grounds of sex. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women sets out obligations of States parties to ensure the practical realization of the principle of equality of men and women. The treaty bodies monitoring implementation of these Conventions address the situation of the girl child in their constructive dialogue with States parties, concluding comments, and general recommendations/comments.

III. Persistent discrimination and violence against the girl child

13. Significant progress has been made in addressing discrimination and violence against girls and recognizing their rights. A total of 192 and 185 States are party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, respectively. International Labour Organization Conventions No. 182 and No. 138 on child labour have been ratified by 87 per cent and 79 per cent of Member States, respectively.[17] Many Governments have strengthened national laws to ban sex selective abortions, combat child labour, increase the minimum age of marriage and address violence against girl children, including child prostitution, trafficking, pornography and sexual abuse. Significant progress has also been made towards improving girls' access to education.[18]

14. Despite these advances, violations of the human rights of girls persist. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the

[13] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 7* (E/2006/27-E/CN.6/2006/15), chap. I, sect. D, resolution 50/2, paras. 3 and 9.

[14] Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/12, chap. IV, Agreed conclusions on the girl child.

[15] General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex.

[16] General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

[17] See http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm.

[18] See report of the Secretary-General on the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2005/2), para. 494.

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women comprehensively set out and protect the rights of children and women respectively, neither instrument consistently or explicitly addresses the specific situation of the girl child.[19]

15. The failure of States to incorporate into domestic law and fully implement their international treaty obligations at national and subnational levels contributes to continuing discrimination and violence against girls.[20] Policy recommendations endorsed at global level have not been fully implemented at the national level, as evidenced in the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action.[18] Discriminatory stereotypical attitudes and behaviours have direct negative implications for the status and treatment of girls. Such stereotypes impede the implementation of legislative and normative frameworks that guarantee gender equality and prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex.

16. At the policy level, concerns specific to the girl child are subsumed under broader policies, strategies and action plans focused on women or children, in national and local contexts. Policies and strategies for gender equality may not always be sufficiently age-sensitive; and child-specific policies may not adequately reflect the special situations, needs and risks faced by girls. Gender-sensitive budget initiatives and budget initiatives which focus on children also tend to neglect the specific needs and priorities of the girl child.

17. Many critical actors, such as government officials, communities and families, remain unaware of girls' rights. Girls themselves may not be fully informed of their rights. Many girls receive less encouragement than boys to participate in and learn about the social, economic and political functioning of society, and are not offered the same opportunities to take part in decision-making processes.

18. Millions of school-age girls worldwide are working in domestic service, which is among the most invisible of female-dominated occupations.[21] Many girls enter domestic work at young ages, around 12 to 14 years, but some are as young as 5 to 7 years old.[22] Official statistics tend to focus on the more visible forms of child labour where more boys are found, while undercounting the informal sector where girls are concentrated.[23] Child domestic labour can expose girls to significant levels of discrimination and violence, with girls isolated in homes with little or no social support or protection.[24] They may suffer verbal, physical, psychological, sexual and economic abuse, as domestic work is excluded from regulation in many countries.

19. Because child labour statistics do not consider household work within the family environment an economic activity, girls' involvement in domestic work in their own households is not recorded. Evidence suggests that girls' involvement in domestic work within their own households contributes to their lower levels of

[19] See report of the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child (EGM/Girl Child/2006/REPORT), para. 42.

[20] Ibid., paras. 37 and 42.

[21] Suriyasarn, Busakorn. From the kitchen to the classroom: call for political commitment and empowerment to get girls out of domestic labour and into school. Expert paper prepared for the United Nations Expert Group Meeting (EGM/DVGC/2006/EP.2).

[22] Ibid., p. 3.

[23] Ibid., p. 2.

[24] International Labour Organization (2006). *The end of child labour: within reach*. Geneva.

enrolment and achievement in schools, thus increasing their likelihood of living in poverty.[25]

20. Despite sustained efforts to increase access of girls to education, estimates indicate that as many as 55 million girls continue to be left out of formal schooling.[26] The Millennium Development Goal 3 target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, has already been missed. Obstacles to girls' regular attendance at school can include fear of violence on school premises, sometimes exacerbated by lack of separate, safe sanitary facilities, as well as on their way to/from school. Even where increased enrolment of girls has been achieved, positive outcomes are not guaranteed, as girls are more likely than boys to repeat classes or to drop out of school.[27] Curricula, textbooks and other educational materials and teaching methods which are not gender-sensitive can reduce the empowering potential of schools. Evidence shows that girls are less motivated to pursue studies in science and technology and have lower achievement levels in these areas than boys, owing to low expectations and stereotypical attitudes.[28] Fewer girls than boys access and use information and communication technology (ICT),[29] and girls continue to be underrepresented in ICT courses, computer clubs and ICT-based careers.

21. The safety of girls is often jeopardized in the family, community and in educational institutions, in the very spaces that are supposed to provide them with safety, and at the hands of individuals and institutions charged with their protection.[30] The risk of sexual abuse at home and in the community is greater for girls than boys.[31] According to a multi-country study by the World Health Organization (WHO), conducted in both developed and developing countries, a large percentage of women reported having been sexually abused before the age of 15, in most cases by male family members other than the father or stepfather.[32] The Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women draws attention to sexual harassment and violence against girls and young women in educational institutions.[33] Sexual and gender-based violence that occurs in educational settings is mostly directed against girls by male teachers and classmates.[34] Girls who engage in sports may face the risk of gender-based violence, exploitation and harassment,

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[25] Zapata, Daniela. Counting invisible workers: girls in domestic activities with their homes. Paper presented to the United Nations Expert Group Meeting (EGM/DVGC/2006/EP.9).

[26] Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mr. V. Munoz Villalobos, entitled "Girls' right to education" (E/CN.4/2006/45).

[27] Grown, C., Rao Gupta, G. and Kes, Aslihan (2005). *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women.* United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Gender Equality. London: Earthscan.

[28] Clegg, Andrew (Ed.) (2006). *Girls and Science: A training module on motivating girls to embark on science and technology careers*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Section for Science and Technology Education, Division for Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education.

[29] United Nations/Division for the Advancement of Women (2005). *Women 2000: gender equality and empowerment of women through ICT.*

[30] EGM/Girl Child/2006/REPORT, para. 38.

[31] A/61/299, paras. 44 and 52.

[32] Ibid., para. 44.

[33] A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1, para. 133.

[34] A/61/299, para. 52.

from other athletes, coaches, managers, spectators, and family or community members.[35]

22. According to the report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children, the imbalance in the sex ratio between girls and boys in some regions suggests that girls are at particular risk of neglect, as well as violence.[36] Son preference persists in many societies and is the main cause of sex-selective abortions of female foetuses and female infanticide.[37]

23. The World Health Organization estimates that between 100 and 140 million women and girls alive today have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting, and that each year, a further 2 million girls are at risk of undergoing the procedure.[38] Female genital mutilation/cutting is an irreparable, irreversible abuse and violates girls' right to protection.[39] WHO reports that most of the girls and women who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting live in 28 African countries, although some live in Asia and the Middle East. They are also increasingly found in Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States of America among immigrant communities.[38]

24. The number of children who enter into marriage or co-habitation each year varies across regions and countries. Among women and girls aged 15 to 24, 48 per cent were married before the age of 18 in South Asia (9.7 million girls), 42 per cent in Africa, and 29 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.[40] Globally, 36 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years were married or in union before they reached 18 years of age.[41] Parents may consent to child marriage out of economic necessity or in order to provide male guardianship for their daughters, to protect them from sexual assault and avoid pregnancy outside of marriage.[42] Childhood or early marriages have extremely negative consequences for young girls. Most girls have to cut short their education, live with their husbands among strangers and submit to sex with an older man.[43] They lack the freedom to interact with their peers and participate in community activities.

25. Girls in early marriages also face the dangers of repeated pregnancies and childbirth. Adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are twice as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth as women in their twenties. For those under 15, the risks are five times higher.[44] For every girl who dies in childbirth, many more will suffer injuries, infections and lingering disabilities, such as obstetric fistula.

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[35] A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1, para. 134.

[36] A/61/299, paras. 43 and 44.

[37] EGM/Girl Child/2006/REPORT, para. 57.

[38] WHO Fact Sheet No. 241, June 2000.

[39] United Nations Children's Fund (2005e), *Female genital mutilation/cutting — a statistical exploration*, New York, p. 2.

[40] _____ (2005c), *Early marriage: a harmful traditional practice -- a statistical exploration*, p. 2.

[41] _____ (2005b), *Child Protection Information Sheets*, Figures taken from *The State of the World's Children 2005*, p. 131.

[42] _____ (2005d), *Child Protection Information Sheets, Childhood Under Threat*, Child marriage, p. 17.

[43] Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, entitled "Cultural practices in the family that are violent towards women" (E/CN.3/2002/83), para. 56.

[44] United Nations Population Fund (2005). *The State of the World Population 2005: The promise of equality: Gender equity, reproductive health and the Millennium Development Goals*, p. 50.

26. There is growing awareness of the importance of prompt birth registration as an essential step in promoting and protecting children's' rights, including the right to identity.[45] The lack of a birth certificate may prevent girls from receiving health care and other services, and from being enrolled in school. Later in childhood and adolescence, identity documents can help protect girls against early marriage, child labour, and other forms of discrimination and violence.[46] Treaty bodies regularly emphasize the importance of raising the minimum legal age of marriage for girls and boys to 18 years with a view to bringing it into line with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and with article 16, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

IV. Girls in high-risk situations

27. Some groups of girls are particularly disadvantaged and at greater risk of discrimination and violence, including adolescent girls, migrant girls, girls with disability or girls in detention. Poverty can be a major underlying factor in the increased risk of some girls to violence and threats to their well-being and development.[47] Certain situations or threats, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, conflict and its aftermath, foreign occupation, displacement and refugee situations can also significantly increase the marginalization and exposure of girls to discrimination and violence. The increased risks girls face in times of upheaval may be partly linked to the breakdown of traditional protective structures, as well as to the disintegration of families in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

28. Girls, aged 10 to 14, are particularly at risk of discrimination and violence. In many regions of the world, societies begin to place restrictions on girls' movement and behaviour with the onset of adolescence.[48] Adolescent girls may be subjected to harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting and early marriage, be withdrawn from school, and be required to bear a large share of domestic and child-rearing duties. They may have less access to their peers and friends and even be confined to the immediate vicinity of the home, which can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and confidence. Despite being at great risk, adolescent married and unmarried girls in this age group are among the most underserved groups.[49] Greater efforts are needed to reach girls aged 10 to 14, especially those living outside the protective structures of family and schools, girls heading households, girls at risk of early marriage and married adolescent girls.

29. Systemic gender-based discrimination inhibits the ability of girls to protect themselves from HIV infection or to respond fully to the consequences of infection. Worldwide, 17.3 million women and girls aged 15 years and older are living with HIV, 48 per cent of the global total.[50] More than 60 per cent of 15 to 25 year olds

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[45] See Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 7.

[46] UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2002). *Birth Registration: Right from the Start*. Innocenti Digest No. 9, March; and United Nations Children's Fund (2005a). *The "Rights" Start to Life: A Statistical Analysis of Birth Registration*. New York: UNICEF.

[47] United Nations Children's Fund (2006). *The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible*. New York.

[48] Mensch, Barbara S., Bruce, Judith and Margaret Green (1998). *The Uncharted Passage: Girls' Adolescence in the Developing World*. New York: Population Council.

[49] See EGM/Girl Child/2006/REPORT, para. 110.

[50] UNAIDS, The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (2006), *Keeping the Promise: An Agenda for Action on Women and AIDS*, p. 9.

living with HIV/AIDS are female.[51] In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly three out of four (74 per cent) young people aged 15 to 24 years living with HIV are female.[50] Girls are particularly at risk of HIV/AIDS because of poverty, lack of education and economic independence, early marriage, limited negotiating power and sexual exploitation and rape. Girls can be enticed into sexual relationships by older men with offers of cash, consumer goods and status, exposing them to HIV.[52] Traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting, increases girls' risk of contracting the disease. Despite these risks, social norms often discourage education and knowledge about sex[53] and girls affected by the pandemic are less likely to have access to health services.[54] Girls who are victims of trafficking are in high-risk situations where they are not able to negotiate safe sex or protect themselves from violence, thereby increasing their risk of HIV.

30. Girls are subjected to discrimination and violence during conflict and post-conflict situations. An estimated 40 per cent of child soldiers are girls who were forcibly or coercively recruited.[55] Girls may be lured by offers of protection and access to safety zones. Many are abducted to take up arms as combatants or to cook, clean, maintain the camps and provide sexual services for the fighting forces. Others are forced to participate in economic activities related to the conflict, such as diamond and gem mining. They are exposed to abuse, exploitation and sexual violence, including through torture, rape, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and trafficking. Rape, including of very young girls, has been used widely as a weapon of war in recent conflicts.[56]

31. In conflict and post-conflict situations, girl-headed households increase. Girls who assume the responsibility as heads of household are at higher risk of sexual abuse, exploitation and exposure to HIV in their efforts to provide for siblings. Girls are exposed to risks of violence when leaving the relative safety of their villages/towns or camps to search for food or fuel.[57] They may be forced to turn to illegal activities, such as prostitution, to survive, with high risk of exposure to violence.[58]

32. While all child soldiers face problems in reintegrating into society owing to psychosocial trauma, disabilities and lack of access to education, girls experience additional obstacles. The deep-rooted stigma they face in their families and communities on return, combined with the trauma resulting from the abuses they have suffered, makes the formulation and delivery of successful reintegration programmes for girls very difficult. As a result, girl soldiers are neglected during the

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[51] UNAIDS/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Development Fund for Women (2004), *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*. New York.

[52] International Labour Organization (2003). *HIV/AIDS and Child Labour*, Paper No. 6, p. 11.

[53] Discussion paper for the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS (A/59/CRP.3), para. 14.

[54] See EGM/Girl Child/2006/REPORT, para. 86.

[55] See Mazurana, Dyan and Carlson, Khristopher (2006). *The girl child and armed conflict: recognizing and addressing grave rights violations of girls' human rights*. Paper presented to the United Nations Expert Group Meeting (EGM/DVGC/2006/EP.12).

[56] See report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, entitled "Intersection of violence against women and HIV/AIDS" (E/CN.4/2005/72), paras. 51-54.

[57] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2006) Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme Conclusion No. 105 (LVII), 2006, on Women and Girls at Risk (A/AC.96/1035).

[58] United Nations (2002), *Women, Peace and Security, study submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)*. Sales No. E.03.IV.1, para. 90.

reintegration process and most disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes overwhelmingly focus on young men and boys.[59]

V. Empowerment of girls

33. The empowerment of girls is key to breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and protecting and promoting their human rights. Empowerment entails a process whereby girls gain more control over their lives, become active members of their communities and are able to make informed choices about issues that directly affect them. Supporting the empowerment of girls entails the elimination of all barriers that prevent them from developing their full potential, including through the provision of equal access to, and full participation in, education and training, health services, community activities, and girl-friendly spaces for interaction with their peers.

34. The international legal and policy framework on the human rights and well-being of girls, which sets out the responsibilities of Governments and other actors to protect these rights and achieve girls' advancement, constitutes the basis for the empowerment of the girl child. Establishing effective accountability mechanisms at all levels significantly enhances the full implementation of this framework.

35. Families and communities play a key role in protecting and empowering the girl child. The social capital of girls, in the form of supportive family, friends and communities, needs to be actively nurtured. The active engagement of parents, teachers, and community leaders is required in order to support the empowerment of girls. Social mobilization, awareness-raising and advocacy, as well as alliances with power-holders at different levels, in both formal and informal settings, are required to increase awareness and knowledge about girls' rights and change negative attitudes and practices that discriminate against them and perpetuate stereotypical behaviour and expectations. Empowerment efforts during early adolescence are critical as girls at this stage in their lives may find that their environments become more restrictive.

36. Personal safety and security is essential for the empowerment of girls. The World Health Organization noted that a safe and supportive environment is part of what motivates young people to make healthy choices.[60] "Safe" refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence) or abuse. "Supportive" refers to an environment that enables positive, close relationships with family, other adults (including teachers, and youth and religious leaders) and peers.

37. "Safe spaces" are important platforms through which to deliver life-skills-building programmes and provide opportunities for girls to develop protective friendship networks, learn about their rights, explore their problems, develop strategies to protect their safety and health, practice team-building, develop leadership capacities and have opportunities for recreation. The acquisition of social assets in the context of safe, girl-friendly spaces contributes to the long-term

[59] Chitalia, Ami and Odeh, Michael. Youth Advocate International (2004). How girl soldiers are punished by their past. In resource paper *Children and Armed Conflict*.

[60] World Health Organization (1999). *Programming for Adolescent Health and Development: Report of a WHO/UNFPA, UNICEF Study Group on Programming for Adolescent Health.* Geneva. WHO T chnical Report Series, no. 886.

possibility for girls to develop a positive self-image, defend their rights and make responsible and informed decisions on matters affecting their lives.

38. Evidence suggests that regular attendance of girls in girls' clubs, integrated girl-friendly centres or youth clubs, over an extended period of time, has a positive impact on their welfare in the long term. It constitutes a promising practice in empowering girls to actively participate in society and counteracting societal pressures which undermine their self-esteem. Access to information relevant to their rights, needs and priorities is a critical element of the empowerment of girls. Increased access to relevant information can empower girls to become involved in organizing with their peers and advocating issues relevant to their lives and their communities.

39. Schools, as the primary institutions for the acquisition of literacy and basic life skills, are crucial drivers in girls' empowerment. Many countries have taken measures to close the gender gap in education, particularly at the primary level, and promoted a gender-sensitive educational environment for girls, both in terms of safety and educational content. Sustained efforts are required to ensure the retention of girls in school and high levels of achievement. In some areas, the provision of scholarships, uniforms, books, free transportation and meals have proven effective in increasing enrolment and retention of girls. Street schools, classrooms in refugee camps, functional literacy classes for out-of-school girls, including married girls, are some examples of successful alternative arrangements to ensure that girls in particularly difficult situations gain access to education.

40. The quality of education, its relevance to the individual and to society at large, the appropriateness of educational content and materials, and gender-sensitive attitudes by teachers are critical factors in ensuring that education contributes positively to the empowerment of girls.

41. Encouraging girls to pursue disciplines traditionally dominated by men, such as science, engineering and technology, is an important means to facilitate their empowerment. Training teachers in gender-sensitivity, revising textbooks to include women scientists as role models and setting up science camps and coaching are some of the means developed to enhance girls' potential in science and technology.

42. Social and psychological support services for girls, especially for those at risk of discrimination and violence, should be an integral part of efforts aimed at girls' empowerment. Girl-targeted programmes should provide age-appropriate integrated services that embrace a wide range of activities, including education on rights, health and nutrition; reproductive health counselling and services; recreational facilities and opportunities such as arts and sports; self-awareness and identity training and self-esteem building tools and activities; as well as various types of vocational training. They should also include efforts to raise girls' awareness of reproductive health issues and to improve their access to information and services, including age-appropriate sex education in schools and other educational settings. Special attention is necessary to focus on the prevention of early pregnancies and the control of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

43. Assisting girls to secure economic independence, particularly girls heading households, is critical for empowerment. Income-generating activities, facilitated by the provision of credit, have successfully supported girls in different contexts, including in coping with the consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and

reintegrating into society after conflict or trafficking.[61] Successful interventions to economically empower girls have also provided financial literacy training; mentoring and social support, counselling and referral services, voluntary savings programmes, as well as internship opportunities in local communities.

44. Information and communication technologies provide unique opportunities for girls' empowerment by improving access to information on health, nutrition, education, and other human development opportunities. They also create new opportunities for social interaction, including peer and bottom-up communication. Strategies and action plans are needed at all levels to address the gender divide in the field of ICT that occurs at a young age.

45. Sport can be a powerful tool for girls' empowerment, leading to the development of critical values and skills, such as teamwork, communication and respect for others. Sport provides new opportunities for developing interpersonal networks, both within schools and communities.[62] Skills acquired in negotiation and decision-making empowers girls to take on leadership roles.

46. Eliminating discrimination and violence and empowering girls requires the active engagement of boys. Boys need to be sensitized at an early stage, within families, schools and communities, to develop respect for the rights of women and girls. Adolescent boys need to be provided with opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue on gender identities and roles and have positive interaction with girls. The involvement of boys is particularly important in relation to sexual and reproductive health, including in the context of HIV/AIDS.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations for eliminating discrimination and violence against girls

47. Discrimination and violence against the girl child persist in all parts of the world, despite progress in raising awareness about the rights of the girl child, the unacceptability of continued violations of these rights and their detrimental impact on society as a whole, and the efforts undertaken to address inequalities in areas such as education, health, and social protection. Institutions charged with the protection of girls, including families, schools and communities, have been implicated in violating the rights of the girl child. The well-being of the girl child is threatened by stereotypical attitudes and behaviour and harmful traditional practices. Poverty and social and economic upheavals caused by armed conflict and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, further exacerbate the risk of abuse and exploitation.

48. The girl child does not receive sufficient explicit attention in policy and programme development and resource allocations. The lack of data disaggregated by sex and age remains a serious constraint to formulating and implementing effective, targeted policies and programmes and monitoring progress in eliminating

[61] Erulkar, Annabel, et al. (2006). Tap and Reposition Youth (TRY): Providing social support, savings, and microcredit opportunities for young women in areas with high HIV prevalence. In *Promoting Healthy, Safe, and Productive Transitions to Adulthood*, Brief no. 15 (July). New York: Population Council.

[62] United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (2003). *Sport as a tool for development and peace: Towards Achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals*. Available at: http://www.un.org/sport2005/.

discrimination and violence. Available national-level statistics may mask the persistence of significant discrimination and violence at subnational or local level, including against groups of girls in situations of high risk. Further development of indicators is required to more systematically and effectively measure progress in addressing discrimination and violence against the girl child.[63]

49. Awareness-raising, community mobilization, and education and training are needed to ensure that all key actors — government officials, including law enforcement and judicial officers, teachers, employers, media professionals and those directly working with girls, as well as parents, families and communities — work to eliminate attitudes and practices which negatively affect girls. The active engagement of men and boys in this work is critical.

50. The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to consider recommending the actions set out below to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl child.

51. **Governments at all levels should:**

(a) **Ratify without reservations the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and their respective Optional Protocols;**

(b) **Ratify, bring national legislation into conformity with, and fully implement, ILO Conventions 138 and 182 on, respectively, the minimum age for employment, and combating the worst forms of child labour (including commercial sexual exploitation, slave-like practices, forced and bonded labour, trafficking, and hazardous forms of child labour) to eliminate child labour of girls;**

(c) **Take all necessary measures to ensure that international human rights instruments relevant to the girl child are incorporated into national law and become fully applicable in domestic legal systems;**

(d) **Remove all laws that discriminate against girls and ensure that provisions of multiple legal systems, where they exist, comply with international human rights standards, in particular the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex;**

(e) **Enact and strictly enforce laws concerning the minimum legal age of consent and the minimum age for marriage, raising the minimum age for marriage where necessary, and generate social support for the enforcement of these laws, inter alia, through increasing educational opportunities for girls;**

(f) **Adopt or revise, as necessary, laws to eliminate child domestic labour of girls and boys under the minimum age for employment, and establish appropriate penalties and sanctions to ensure effective enforcement;**

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[63] The Commission on the Status of Women called for proposals for possible indicators, elaborated in cooperation with the Statistical Commission, to measure progress in implementation with regard to the priority theme (Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9, para. 17). The Statistical Commission will discuss the modalities for this collaboration with the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-eighth session from 27 February to 2 March 2007. See EGM/Girl Child/2006/REPORT for proposals of possible further indicators.

(g) Develop policies, protocols and rules to ensure the effective implementation of legislative frameworks on eliminating discrimination and violence against girls, and put in place adequate accountability mechanisms at national and local levels to monitor adherence to, and implementation of, these mechanisms;

(h) Follow up on and implement the recommendations that emanate from periodic reviews of implementation of treaty obligations, and communications and inquiry procedures, as applicable, by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

(i) Create and maintain, where not currently in place, birth, death and marriage data registries with full national coverage;

(j) Incorporate attention to the needs of children, giving explicit attention to girls, in budget processes at all levels, including resource allocation and expenditure reviews to ensure adequate resources for the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls.

52. **Governments at all levels, international organizations including the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders, as appropriate, should:**

(a) Conduct surveys of the situation of girls at national and subnational levels to identify groups at high risk of discrimination and violence, ensuring that all data is disaggregated by age, education, marital status, geographical location, ethnicity, and income;

(b) Incorporate gender analysis, including explicit attention to the situation of girls, into the development and implementation of policies and programmes in all areas, including in the context of international development assistance as relevant, to ensure that the needs and priorities of girls, especially girls in high-risk situations, are identified and addressed;

(c) Utilize gender impact assessments as part of monitoring and evaluation to ensure that policies and programmes do not perpetuate or exacerbate discrimination and violence against girls, but actively promote and protect the rights of girls;

(d) Support the development of unified methods and standards for data collection on all forms of discrimination and violence against girls, especially forms that are under-documented;

(e) Collect data and systematically report on internationally agreed indicators related to the girl child;

(f) Develop additional indicators, as appropriate, to more systematically and effectively measure progress in eliminating discrimination and violence against the girl child;

(g) Ensure that follow-up to and implementation of the recommendations contained in the United Nations study on violence against children and the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women and related resolutions of the General Assembly, includes explicit attention to girls at all levels;

(h) Provide age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services to girl victims/survivors of gender-based violence, including health, counselling and legal services, hotlines/helplines and shelters, and ensure adequate human and financial resources for these services;

(i) Develop the competence of all personnel in the legal, criminal justice, health and education systems to secure the rights of victims/survivors of violence against girls through professional education, training and other awareness and capacity-building programmes;

(j) Increase resources in all sectors to enable girls to access information and develop the capacities and skills required to attain the highest standard of physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health, and ensure girls' access to age-appropriate sex education, with special attention to the prevention of early pregnancy and the control of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS;

(k) Ensure that boys as well as girls have access to age-appropriate information and services on sexual and reproductive health;

(l) Actively support, through the allocation of appropriate financial resources, targeted, innovative programmes that address the needs and priorities of girls in high-risk situations who have difficulties accessing services and programmes, such as married girls, young mothers, child labourers, girls affected by HIV/AIDS, girls with disabilities, victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and girls affected by conflict;

(m) Take appropriate measures to provide a supportive environment for girls infected with, and affected by, HIV/AIDS, including by providing appropriate counselling and psychosocial support, ensuring their enrolment in school and equal access to shelter, nutrition, health and social services, as well as to protect them from all forms of discrimination, violence, exploitation and abuse;

(n) Identify and address the needs of girls heading households, including in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for, inter alia, protection, access to financial resources, access to health care and support services, and opportunities to continue their education;

(o) Ensure that girls who meet the minimum age requirement for employment have equal access to decent work conditions, are protected from economic exploitation, sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace, and have access to education and vocational training, health services, food, shelter and recreation;

(p) Develop policies and programmes to address the situation of girls who meet the minimum age for employment in the informal sector, in particular domestic workers, by promoting and protecting their human rights and preventing economic exploitation, ill-treatment and sexual abuse;

(q) Strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising programmes on harmful traditional practices, including child and forced marriages, female genital mutilation/cutting, engaging community and religious leaders, educational institutions, and families, and provide increased financial support to efforts at both national and subnational levels to end these practices;

(r) Protect girls in conflict, refugee and internal displacement situations, where girls are targeted for violence, and provide appropriate redress and rehabilitation to girls subjected to such violence;

(s) Prosecute all perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence against girls in situations of armed conflict, including United Nations international and national personnel;

(t) Take measures to ensure that the specific needs of girls affected by armed conflict are taken into account in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including in refugee camps, and in reconstruction efforts and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes;

(u) Incorporate information on the rights of children, giving explicit attention to girls, in the mandates, operational guidelines and training programmes of peacekeeping forces, police, and humanitarian workers in conflict and post-conflict situations;

(v) Ensure that the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) of 26 July 2005, under the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, includes a specific focus on the girl child with respect to each of the six grave violations against children;

(w) Work to ensure that national action plans to halt recruitment and use of children in situations of armed conflict and other grave violations, as requested in Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) of 22 April 2004 and 1612 (2005), identify and address the specific vulnerabilities of girls in armed conflict;

(x) Identify constraints and gaps and develop strategies to ensure accelerated achievement of equality in enrolment and completion of schooling at the primary and secondary levels for all girls;

(y) Promote gender-sensitive, empowering educational processes, by reviewing and revising as necessary, school curricula, educational materials and teacher-training programmes;

(z) Ensure safe school environments for girls by implementing measures such as increased recruitment of women teachers, policies of zero tolerance for violence against girls, provision of appropriate sanitation and recreational facilities, and securing of safe routes to and from school;

(aa) Take concrete policy and programme measures to encourage and support girls' interest and involvement in fields and occupations traditionally dominated by men, such as natural sciences, mathematics, information and communication technologies and sports;

(bb) Promote and support increased access of girls to ICT, particularly girls in rural areas and other disadvantaged situations, through measures such as appropriate financial allocations and development of safe environments;

(cc) Integrate a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of discrimination and violence against girls into education and training curricula at all levels;

(dd) Develop well-resourced educational programmes to reach girls who are not enrolled in formal education programmes due to specific life circumstances, inter alia, extreme poverty, child labour, abuse or exploitation, trafficking, conflict and displacement, migration, early marriage, pregnancy and motherhood;

(ee) Encourage the active participation of boys, from an early age, in the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls, including through the promotion of gender-sensitive socialization processes, targeted programmes and creation of spaces and environments where boys can be guided in challenging gender stereotypes and negative attitudes towards girls.

53. **Governments at all levels, international organizations including the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders, as appropriate, should increase advocacy for and take the following actions to ensure the empowerment of girls:**

(a) Provide education and training on the rights of girls to families, community leaders, and all professions relevant to the protection and empowerment of girls, such as social workers, police officers, judges and prosecutors, to increase awareness and commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of girls and appropriate responses to rights violations;

(b) Disseminate the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the periodic reports submitted by States parties and the concluding comments of the Committees, to the general public in national and local languages, for example, through publicly accessible websites, and produce child-friendly versions to reach both girls and boys;

(c) Engage local community leaders and opinion makers, including in schools, religious and traditional institutions, community organizations, trade unions, businesses and the media, in creating opportunities for dialogue among women and men, and girls and boys, within families, schools and communities, to develop common understanding of the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of girls, eliminating discrimination and violence and empowering them;

(d) Develop appropriately funded programmes to address stereotypical attitudes and behaviours that contribute to discrimination and violence against girls, working specifically with men and boys and other critical actors, such as media professionals;

(e) Encourage male decision makers at all levels, with responsibilities for policies, legislation, programmes and allocation of public resources, to play leadership roles in the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls and the promotion of girls' empowerment;

(f) Develop and adequately fund safe and supportive spaces which facilitate girls' empowerment, such as clubs for girls, peer education programmes, life-skills programmes, and other gender-sensitive youth services, which increase access of girls to, inter alia, legal services and information, sexual and reproductive health information and services, mentorship programmes — including peer mentorship, and recreation, and provide

enhanced opportunities for girls, particularly adolescent girls, to meet and interact with their peers, learn about their rights, discuss their problems, and develop leadership capacities and networking skills.

54. **The Commission may wish to encourage the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to:**

(a) **Invite States parties to ensure that their reports explicitly address the situation of the girl child;**

(b) **Ensure that the Committees' lists of issues and questions prepared as part of the consideration of States parties' reports explicitly request information about the situation of the girl child at the national and subnational levels;**

(c) **Encourage submission of information from and dialogue with civil society institutions working with girls in the process of reviewing States parties reports;**

(d) **Increase direct collaboration between the Committees, including preparation of a joint general recommendation on the girl child.**